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Economies of Acquaintances

Social Relations during Shopping at Food Markets and in Consumers' Food Cooperatives

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I researched two forms of shortened food supply chain in Poland from the perspective of social relations. This involves qualitative analysis of interviews with the customers of seven open-air food markets in Małopolska region and the members of one Krakow cooperative. Such markets are traditional forms, continuously and deeply rooted in households' everyday provision strategies, whereas food cooperatives are typical Alternative Food Networks inspired by Western experiences and have only existed in Poland for a few years. The two forms have distinct similarities, as they refer to directness and locality and are critical of dominant, mass economic institutions. However, the analysis of consumers' interviews points to clear differences rooted in historical and structural determinants. These differences result in their different dynamic and contrasting roles in the food system and food culture of Poland. Owing to their inclusiveness and comparative popularity, open-air markets in Poland offer a universally accessible source of fresh produce. Furthermore, their strong social embeddedness increases their capacity to adapt to the current economic conditions and clients' needs. The social-network nature of cooperatives, meanwhile, results in limitations in the scope of their operation, yet at the same time leads to innovative solutions and political narratives that are critical toward the mainstream food system. The criticism of markets, on the other hand, is based on conservative resistance, related to everyday food practices, private experiences, cultural values, and nostalgia.

Keywords: *food markets; food cooperatives; social relations; postsocialist economy; Poland*

Contemporary food systems represent challenges that both result in the development of new social forms and restore older models. The latter come repackaged with new definitions and legitimations, and are sometimes remarkably close to the most innovative institutions. Below I compare two similar forms of food shopping functioning in Poland and referring to the idea of a local economy based on community. One of these is open-air food markets (food bazaars), which have been in operation in Poland for centuries and are ingrained in the cultural-economic foodscape. The second form is food cooperatives, which are relatively new in Poland. These are based on semiformal associations and focused on collective ordering

directly from farmers. The format of Polish cooperatives is based on an informal network of consumers, who make their orders frequently and buy fresh food from trusted producers. A more formalised model (employing members, running a shop, pre-ordering before the growing season) is rare.

Both forms, markets and cooperatives, respond to the demand for fresh, unprocessed food, produced using traditional methods and distributed on a small scale. Yet the roles that the two institutions play in the food system are distinctly different. A more detailed analysis of them allows us to discern a heterogeneous dynamics of eating patterns. By focusing on relations, we can identify the moments in which differences in structural social factors are revealed. By examining food purchases using the concept of alterity, their role in the food system can be identified. Finally, placing the research in a historical-cultural context permits us to make a broader interpretation of the results. The research was inspired by the more general question of the process of cultural diffusion of Alternative Food Networks (AFN) from Western societies to Eastern Europe and their relations with local, more established institutions.

Eastern European Contexts and Theoretical Framework

I use the concept of embeddedness employed by Karl Polanyi,[1] and redefined by Mark Granovetter,[2] to problematise the specific nature of economic exchange in Eastern Europe. According to Granovetter, the network of relations in which exchange takes place and individuals and collective entities function has a substantial influence on the order of the transaction. The historical determinants of the specificity of food-related social networks in Poland include, among others, continuity of the elements of a traditional, premodern economy and social institutions (e.g., family structures or religious everyday life rhythms). The agricultural tradition and experience of informal food production are commonly identified as characteristics of Eastern European food patterns.[3] The strengthening of alternative, informal bonds during socialism was linked to a lack of predictability of institutional arrangements and a lack of security in households' everyday food supply. Exchange networks, which we can call "economies of acquaintances," were based on informal social relationships, and were often incompatible with the institutional framework.[4] Additionally, given the oppressive nature of the political system, and the distrust in socialist state institutions, these cultural/economic practices[5] also had political overtones (e.g., black-market activities treated as political resistance). The processes of modernisation of the economy were not based, as in the West, on an individualistic conception of economic entities, but rather on a model of strong networks, relationality, collective entities, and communities. These factors, combined with the recurring inefficiency of the economic system, translated into a reinforced role of grassroots, informal, "underground," or "double" social structures,[6] as well as leading to the establishment of the "dividual person" as theorised by Elizabeth Dunn.[7]

Further factors contributing to the development of alterities within the food system in Eastern Europe are analogous to those present in the West, meaning the need to respond to mass, industrial food production and other imperfections of global food markets. Among the forms that this response takes in Poland are the development of consumer food cooperatives. Owing to local economic, cultural, and political circumstances, however, alterities within food production and distribution[8] have a slightly different meaning. The overwhelming changes in the political-economic system mean that alterity is a blurred category in the post-socialist food system.[9] It is not clear which of the co-existing economic relations used to be conventional and "normal."[10] The collapse of communism and the transitional 1990s failed to make these categories much clearer, considering the dramatic political and economic transformations and re-use of past practices. The social definitions of the traditional–modern, natural–artificial, stability–change, and normality–deviance dichotomies are therefore constantly in motion.[11] For example, buying at farmers' markets or within a cooperative scheme are both alternative—or at least they are defined as such by consumers, as this study shows. Yet whereas there is no doubt that cooperatives are a typical AFN in accordance with the accepted definitions in Western literature,[12] food markets do not quite fit this definition, mostly because of their historical roots, relative popularity, and strong position within the dominant food system. They do fulfil some of the characteristics of AFNs distinguished in Sini Forssell and Leena Lankoski's meta-analysis: non-conventional values and goals of participants (here: consumers), increased requirements for products and production, reduced distance between consumers and producers, and strong relationships. At food bazaars dominated by intermediary vendors and based on conventional agricultural products, the criterion of directness and the key, albeit controversial, criterion of innovativeness ("new forms of market governance")[13] are not fulfilled. Food markets are therefore not AFNs as understood by researchers of Western forms,[14] although they clearly possess some of the same features. Summing up, the concept of alternativeness is anchored in the rationales and trajectories of Western economies, and hence it only roughly applies to the dynamics of other economies.

The most important differences in the roles played by economic institutions concern the context in which they operate. Traditional open-air food bazaars in Eastern Europe are therefore evidently different from many of the farmers' markets found in the West, which are typical AFNs. The former gather disparate groups of consumers, including economically disadvantaged groups,[15] whereas the new type of farmers' markets in the USA, for example, are more obviously restricted in terms of class.[16] Alber and Kohler's study also reveals the importance of the cultural-economic context, when showing differences of informal food production's influence on subjective well-being among low-income groups in former command economies and in the old EU.[17] Hence, the determinants of the variety of outputs are not only economic ones (local food production costs, farm structure, wages, income distribution, etc.), but the cultural and historical patterns strongly influence the processes within food systems.[18]

However, considering the cultural determinants of the relations, related to food both directly (e.g., food symbolism) and indirectly (e.g., gender roles or family structure), goes beyond Granovetter's model of embeddedness. Economic activities, including food shopping, are not only located in interpersonal relations networks, but also belong to the realm of values, social roles, class positions, etc.[19] Daniel Miller utilised such an expanded understanding of relationality in interpretation of food shopping in his research in north London.[20] He rejected the popular understanding of shopping as being based on consumerist impulses and whims, instead interpreting shopping practices through reference to terms of sacrifice and ritual, as well as parenthood, devotion, love, and power. In this way, the social model of interpersonal relations is supplemented by relations towards values. Certainly, both these levels—social relations and relations towards values—together with the historical, political, class layer etc., are realised simultaneously, merging together and giving a unique meaning to individual economic practices.

Considering the above determinants of food-related supply networks, it should be stated that social embeddedness of economic behaviour does not apply only to informal or nonmarket transactions. Embeddedness is an aspect of every kind of economy.[21] Therefore, supply strategies are analysed here as socially embedded in a particular way. They consist of marketness and instrumentalism as well as of emotions, values, or intimate relations. These "logics" cannot be seen a priori as contradictory factors, but as intertwined and in reference to each other.[22]

Food Patterns in Poland: an Overview

Expenditure on food comprises a large proportion of Polish household budgets. Although it has been decreasing steadily almost since the beginning of the transformation period (in 1993 the figure was 41.5 percent), in 2014 food still accounted for 24.4 percent of all purchases.[23] According to Eurostat, the average figure for Europe in 2014 was 13 percent, although the Central and Eastern European region is dominated by numbers closer to the Polish ones.[24] At the same time, the absolute value of expenditure on food in Poland is approximately half of the analogous figures for Europe's richer countries, and Polish food prices are among the lowest in Europe (approximately 61 percent of the EU average).[25] These data correspond with the relatively low economic status of Polish households, land fragmentation, heterogeneity of agriculture, and presence of small-scale producers, for whom open-air markets are important distribution channels. Moreover, half of farms produce for their own use, mostly in a traditional way, with "family/household logic," instead of "productivity logic."

The food habits of Poles are relatively conservative, dominated by a model in which the main, hot meal is immutably and universally (over 90 percent) consumed

at home.[26] Homemade food is regarded as better, healthier, and adapted to the needs of the household members. Neither the idea of institutional food promoted in the communist era nor the consumerist aspirations of more sophisticated "eating out" options carved out a significant position in the Polish foodscape.[27] The inclination towards eating at home is in keeping with the dominance of women in carrying out domestic foodwork.[28] But this conservative picture of eating customs in Poland becomes more complicated when we take into account sociodemographic differences, in particular education. This clearly translates into "gastronomic curiosity": openness to new meals, inspirations drawn from the media, a propensity to experiment, as well as eating out.[29] The change in consumer habits in the last decade or two has also been visible in choices of places for shopping. There has been a clear tendency for the small shops and bazaars dominant in 1998 to give way to large self-service supermarkets and discount stores.[30]

Age-Old Food Markets and New Cooperatives

The food market is a traditional form of trade in Poland. In the past, cyclical weekly markets and occasional fairs were, alongside door-to-door sales, the main form of trading.[31] The rhythm of markets reflected that of social and religious life and of the agricultural economy.

The market is a flexible form that adapts to the current economic, social, and legal conditions. In the historical agrarian society, this meant that the object of trade was cattle and swine, grain, handicraft, products not produced on farms, and luxury items. During the Second World War, illegal food circulation allowed people to survive despite the devastating rationing enforced by the occupiers. In Poland's post-war history, open-air bazaars and flea markets were a supplement to the official, centrally controlled state economy. It was often here that the informal economy developed—the grey area and black market of production, and domestic and foreign trade. Almost everything could be bought there: from animal fats and fresh milk to electronic devices and cars. The 1990s and the transition to a capitalist system saw a boom in markets and bazaars, which in no time became the main delivery channels for imported goods and the cradle of the emerging free-market entities.[32] According to surveys, in 1997 31 percent of people in Poland declared that they regularly bought food at markets, while the figure in 2010 was just 8 percent of respondents.[33] The reasons for this change are the decided domination of supermarkets and globalising processes of food systems. Joining the EU in 2004 and widening mass supply channels affected Polish agriculture as well as food patterns.

Although open-air markets have become much less popular in Poland, a dense network of them persists. In 2014, some 2,114 markets were registered, dominated by minor retail sales (including 139 in Małopolska). The area of open-air markets per

inhabitant is up to four times larger in the region with the highest figure than in the one with the lowest (Małopolska is close to the Polish average). This area proportion positively correlates with the fragmentation of food supply chains: low rate of supermarkets, high density of shops, high percentage of small-scale (up to 25 acres/10 ha) and semi-subsistence farms.[34]

Despite the marked fall in indications of markets as the main place of shopping for food, around a half of Poles (49 percent) visit them at least sometimes. Markets have lost their transformation functions of grand bazaars offering the greatest availability of goods, but they remain a venue for occasional or seasonal shopping or a place where people look for selected products. They continue to offer diverse goods aimed at various clients: usually people shop for food, but also cleaning products (more commonly people living in rural areas) as well as shoes and clothing (more often poorer respondents).[35]

Consumer food cooperatives are a new form in Poland, having carved a place in the landscape of large cities only in the last few years and with a relatively small number of consumers (a few thousand people—own estimate, based on cooperatives' websites and declarations). According to Polish cooperatives' websites and Aleksandra Bilewicz and Ruta Śpiewak's study,[36] there are about thirty cooperatives in Poland. The first cooperatives were founded in 2010, and since 2012 their members have been meeting at Open Food Cooperatives Meetings (2012, Warsaw; 2013, Lodz; 2014, Krakow; 2015, Warsaw). Cooperatives' rules of operation vary, but they are founded upon the principles of direct exchange between the consumer and producer of food as well as the engagement of members in working on behalf of the cooperative. On the axiological level, we observe the appearance of ideas of fair trade, support for local and sustainable food production, and the cooperative social movement.

The cooperative movement in Poland stretches back to the 1860s.[37] After its boom period in the early twentieth century, however, the cooperative movement was nationalised and lost its ideological legitimation and bottom-up character.[38] Today, the members of new cooperatives invoke the pre-war traditions of such figures as Edward Abramowski, Romuald Mielczarski, and Maria Dąbrowska.

Bilewicz and Śpiewak's conclusion following their extensive research is that contemporary cooperatives in Poland have the character of class enclaves, based on lifestyle characteristics. They identify both activist cooperatives comprising radical intelligentsia and professional/middle-class consumer-oriented cooperatives characterised by exclusiveness and social distinction.[39] The authors argue that this, as well as the demand for local quality food and bio-products, limits the development of cooperatives in Poland. There is indeed no doubt that both cooperatives and some other alternative food chains are a strong means of distinction. At the same time, though, their growing presence in the social consciousness means that they also inspire and change mainstream economic practices. Their capacity to provide new meanings for food consumption influences the entire food system.

Data and Methods

The analysis is a study of Małopolska (Lesser Poland) region in southern Poland. Five members of one Krakow consumer food cooperative and fifteen customers of seven regional markets and health-food shops were interviewed using a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The research encompassed only traditional, regularly held markets and did not consider pop-up markets or the new type of markets focused on bio-products and aimed at a narrower group of middle-class clients and foodies. The research was conducted in June and July 2013. The cooperative members were sampled with a snowball method, since the researcher was involved in the co-op's activities. The fifteen interviews with customers of food markets were sampled purposively: the aim was to diversify the sample group according to the size of the market, its type (rural/urban, district/town/regional reach), and the size of the city.[40] As a result, the empirical data concerned open-air markets, in fairly small settlements as well as Krakow's typical urban markets. The size of the markets fluctuated between small, at just thirty to fifty vendors (Wojnicz, Na Stawach, Rydla), to the largest market in Małopolska, where the number of stalls periodically reaches three hundred (Plac Imbramowski). The interviews were supplemented by observations, examination of existing data (surveys, cooperative websites), and photographs taken during the research. The interviews each lasted around an hour, and generally took place in locations associated with the purchase of food, at markets, a food festival (cooperative), sites of consumption (a café, a bakery), as well as the respondents' homes. Their subject matter included the shopping the interviewee had carried out that day, selection criteria, and people encountered, as well as more general principles, motivations, routines, habits, seasonality, and family stories. The aim of the research was to reveal what lies beneath the terms "directness," "trust," and "locality" formulated in the two institutions. Both interview protocols included in-depth questions concerning particular practices and opinions, and respondents were asked to describe them in detail.

The interviews and additional information (notes, observations, photos, short interviews with markets' sellers) were transcribed and coded using CAQDAS software (MaxQda). Open, data-driven coding was then performed, and the richest (most detailed, frequent, important for interviewees) and theoretically relevant categories were chosen. The most important groups of codes, which were a vital part of the analysis, were for cooperatives: qualities of food, farmers and ordering, routines and procedures (roles, communication channels), opinions and expectations concerning cooperatives and food system, political engagement, political ideas and inspirations. For markets, the most fruitful groups of the analysed codes included shopping routines (temporal and spatial), qualities of food and food production (naturalness, taste, "chemicals," criteria of choice), the role of the markets within the food system, the relationships connected to food chains (family networks and family roles), interaction with sellers, food markets as places and communities ("atmosphere," pleasures

of shopping, sociability, familiarity, etc.). The findings of the study concerned the venues identified above, but the study did not reveal characteristics distinguishing them markedly from other markets and cooperatives in Poland, at least within the scope of the study. When generalising, however, it is necessary to consider some regional diversification of the agricultural context as well as variations of cooperatives' modes of operation.

Social Capital at Open-Air Markets

Markets are, alongside farms, a legally distinct place of sales of fresh, unprocessed food within the scope of so-called primary production. They can be the results of small-scale or non-industrial farming, garden cultivation, or fruit and mushrooms collected in public forests. Non-animal products predominate, since the regulations on animals and animal products are stricter. The sales of non-animal primary products is subject only to general directives and hygiene rules, while food is often not packed, not labelled, and can vary widely in terms of quality, variants, type of cultivation, freshness, and ripeness. Customers of markets have to make choices themselves, a task that can be complicated by the wide selection, meaning that knowledge, experience, and strategies requiring cultural and social capital are needed.

Open-air markets have relatively constant groups of sellers and consumers. The same vendors tend to be at every market (about 60 percent operate every day[41]), while informants also attend their markets regularly, at least once a week. Buying food is a cyclical activity, with its rhythm and script, therefore assuring repetitiveness. The informants stressed that at the market they have their own paths, vendors, and rituals.[42]

> We go to the square and you might, say, follow a set path from stall to stall, and then, you know, almost recreationally we'll have a look what's on the other stands, see the prices, how the products look. In summer whether any mushrooms have appeared, if they're there yet. (Kra/FM/m/50)

To a certain extent, the shopping route is determined by the layout of the market, yet this is a strongly individualised matter, as customers often turn back and return to the same stalls. Routes are modified according to the season, although some strategies remains constant. The first circuit is a review of the selection and prices, and only afterwards does the actual buying begin, following a hierarchy from the most to the least preferred vendor. The choice of product is closely related to the choice of vendor, who in turn is incorporated in the network of social relations. The ritual "tour" of the market indicates the need to constantly verify one's preferences. Granovetter observed specific characteristics of socially embedded economies: although they

assure security, directness, and certain—as it has been acquired personally—knowledge, at the same time the lack of an institutional framework and guarantees makes the participants more vulnerable to the risk of breaking a contract.[43] This risk is minimised by building trust, which at food markets always entails a personal, relatively unique relationship. As a result, the acquaintance allows departure from the pattern of anonymous trade and makes more flexible, "friendly" exchange possible, as well as providing the satisfaction of building and maintaining social bonds. In this process the disorganised, not entirely regulated network of trading turns into a safe, predictable, and regulated practice.

> The lady I buy potatoes from and I always exchange a few words about the weather, about anything, or actually about children—that kind of loose conversation. It's nice, it produces a nice atmosphere, and apart from that I know that the atmosphere we create means that she feels a touch of fondness for me and I think this'll make her more honest when selling—she won't chuck some old fruit or vegetables at me, she'll treat me as an acquaintance. (Wie/FM/f/40)

Maintaining good contacts and a favourable atmosphere translates directly into effective and efficient shopping. This results in access to the best wares as well as to information, which in turn makes it easier to plan purchases and get hold of rare goods, and can also deliver savings in time and money.

> I used to like going to my boys [laughs], I call them "my boys" because when I spent 40 złoty, or 50 złoty, they'd reduce the price themselves or give me something for free. (Wie/FM/f/35)

Food markets allow individual relationships to be formed between the buyer and the seller or, sometimes, producer. It is not rare to set the conditions of the transaction by telephone, take individual orders, or just move the exchange beyond the space of the market. This is possible thanks to the lack of legal formalisation and standardisation of the trading relationship, which can be freely modified and negotiated by both sides.[44]

The flexibility of exchange that is part of open-air food markets is a clear example of the connection between social capital and access to food. Construction of thick social networks is a frequently described reaction of households to food insecurity (because of drought, war, political instability etc.), and is connected to a lesser threat of hunger.[45] But taking into account the relative continuity of these "networking strategies," despite massive economic transitions, they shall be seen rather as a cultural pattern and cultural resource. Dunn's[46] concept of "dividual" person applies here. Clients at bazaars not only perceive themselves in relation to other people, but also transform the reality around themselves by engaging in interpersonal relations. Making friends with the vendor directly translates into "successful" shopping. Therefore, the instrumentalism and privatisation of exchange are complementary

here, rather than opposing extremes of the social-economic dichotomy.[47] Economic calculations are made here, and interpersonal relations maintained, both embedded in social, cultural, and historical structures.

The intimacy between vendor and customer is built up slowly and results from the permanence of the institution of the market and consumers' habits. It also encompasses wider family and neighbourhood networks.

> You come to the market, and the stallholder has known you since you were a child. They often know your family, because you come with your young child, and then the child is bigger and talks about school, about life. I've known my boys [vendors] more than I think. . . . My son is 14, and I remember I was going to them when I was pregnant and even sooner, so you could say that my family is growing together with them. I also see how they develop. They used to have quite a crummy stall, now it's better and better. So I can just see how they develop, they see how my children grow up and we are, you could even say, almost friends. (Wie/FM/f/35)

Families and communities therefore meet each other at the market, not as individuals. Since there is strong gender diversification within food planning, buying, and preparing in Poland,[48] customers of food markets are usually women. During shopping, they represent all the members of the household: their needs, preferences, and health requirements. However, they are not passive representatives. It is mostly women who are in charge of feeding the household, designating the common rhythm, and imposing a certain food philosophy and food education, of both children and adults. "My husband eats what I give him. Except that with vegetables he's not so good, I'm the main 'consumer' of vegetables and fruit. I rather force my husband to eat them [laughs]" (Wie/FM/f/60).

The task of buying food at the market is sometimes delegated to other members of the household. The assistant is often the husband, son, or son-in-law, who either accompany the main shopper or go on their own, with a list or instructions prepared in advance by the mother or wife. All the interviews revealed a similar division of gender roles: women's responsibility and "food management" versus men's help and occasional cooking.[49] One of the interviews took place with a young man doing the shopping on his own in a small town near Krakow. The food he was to buy was meant to be used at a barbecue with friends. This man often went to market, buying a small amount of food for himself spontaneously (single portions on the way to work), but also did larger and heavier shopping for his elderly parents and in-laws. He described these bigger trips as being planned and "ordered" by his wife, mother, or mother-in-law. Therefore, whoever is running the household's errands, the whole family benefits from it; hence, family structure is still noticeable.

In the trading network, then, the private sphere and family structures are involved, providing the meaningful social background of both buyers and sellers and shaping their relations at the market. Owing to the continuity of markets and informality and

personalised buyer–seller relations, the relations between their participants acquire a certain temporal depth. "I buy my fish and meat from a friend I was in the army with" (Kra/T/m/50), reports a fifty-year-old respondent who completed his military service three decades ago.

For their customers, the personal, informal aspect of markets is one of their biggest advantages over other forms of shopping. Large shops, in which relations are standardised and depersonalised, tend to offer the polar opposite of this experience. At markets there is room for kindness which clients interpret as honest, selfless, and spontaneous. This interpretation (which is not present in the context of supermarkets) makes satisfying and pleasurable relations possible.

> I had this situation with a certain lady with a market booth. I was very happy because my dog was treated very well, because in summer you could see he was panting and finding it really tough. A lady brought a bucket over and gave him some water, and when he finished drinking she gave him some more, and that happened a few times, not just in one booth. . . . I usually leave the dog out front . . . but at times I'll go into a booth with him and I've never had any criticism for that, or been asked to leave, except for the bakery. But at the bakery the lady said that they have CCTV, that the boss insists on it, so they can't let me. (Kra/FM/f/30)

In the above statement, we see a juxtaposition of formal safety or hygiene rules (the ban on dogs entering bakeries) and individual motives. Market sellers are not subject to the rules of formalised trading, so their relations with customers are individualised. They are able to give a dog water, let it in the shop, hand a lollipop to a child, offer a discount, or throw in a product for free. There is also buying "on tick," which 59 percent of Polish society have experienced.[50] Such flexibility of exchange is possible only outside of the anonymised, formalised trading order of the supermarket: in corner shops, rural shops, and at public markets.

Flexible exchange and individualized relationships are not limited to sympathy and friendships, but they also take the forms of antipathies, conflicts, and frictions. Shopping turns into a complex game of identities, values, as well as power:

> I get some things from this lady, a "friend" in inverted commas. I don't fully trust her. I mean I buy fruit from her, quite a lot of fruit. . . . But over the year it varies, because she also likes to cheat a little bit, or sometimes to sneak something in there, so *I try to keep her in check*. When she went to the forest and spent five hours picking bilberries, she doesn't have to be the cheapest. I don't get angry. But that lady's slipped up a couple of times, sometimes I'll bypass her, but generally I call her my friend at the market [laughs]. (Krze/FM/w/nd, emphasis added)

Shopping is sometimes motivated by compassion and the desire to support friends, relations, or people that we do not know but who are clearly located in the network with their own unique story.

> I have a stand, a very nice one. It's young people who grow vegetable seedlings, herb seedlings, and I buy a lot there. And I've been buying even more since I found out that the son of this lady had graduated, was an engineer, and couldn't find a job. And he wasn't too keen on working on the stall. . . . But he didn't have work, his mum got ill, and sooner or later he was forced by the situation to help his parents, because there was no alternative. (Pro/FM/f/45)

As in the above statement, then, we witness personal motives of support by buying products, sometimes even regardless of or contrary to economic reasoning. The factor of supporting local economic tradition is a distinct motive here. All the respondents deemed local products to be better, tastier, and produced in harmony with nature and tradition. They therefore declared that they bought local fruit and vegetables, or at least Polish ones, even if they were sometimes smaller, deformed, less coloured, dirty, or slightly damaged or flawed.

In their statements, respondents contrasted products' nice appearance, as an apparent indicator of quality, with taste, smell, and nutritional values, which are invisible to an inexperienced consumer and demand to be recognised, which in turn requires competences. They very frequently invoked their own experiences, their own knowledge of food production, or the family traditions and memories.

> I was raised in the countryside and many, many years ago my grandma and I used to have a little garden. I know exactly what carrots and parsley look like. Sometimes their roots were tangled, and it was rarely the case that they were as smooth and regular as in kids' books. That would be difficult. . . . When one apple is irregular and another one is bruised, it means that they are just from the tree, without any improvements. (Wie2/T/k/40)

The common experience of food production results from the popularity of dacha-type garden plots as well as continuous farming traditions (Poland was the only Eastern Bloc country where agriculture operated continuously following the unsuccessful collectivisation of the 1950s). This results in the appearance of a unique prosumer model of client, on whose basis to a degree the buyer shares the competences of the producer. The buyer's experience as a small-scale producer translates not only into empathy and solidarity but also into apposite shopping decisions that permit an independent evaluation of the purchased products. This culturally embedded knowledge differs from the consumer knowledge of supply chains of supermarkets, especially as it is based on personal experience and transparency of the production chain, and characterised by a lengthy time perspective.

Cooperatives' Politics of Food and Sociability

Former and current experience of food production less frequently appears in the narratives of the urban cooperative, but reference to localness also features in the

motivations of its members. They emphasise the need to order products directly from farms no more than a few dozen kilometres away, so that the fruit and vegetables are good-quality, that is, fresh and healthy. Good food also means naturalness, using traditional small-scale cultivation methods, without modern fertilisers and pesticides. Strict expectations concerning directness and naturalness sometimes make a cooperative's members less enthusiastic about food bazaars, which they see as not sufficiently transparent. Certificates and official approvals are less important. This stems from scepticism towards overpriced polit-brands,[51] the situation of ecological farming in Poland,[52] and the fact that in low-investment Polish farming traditional cultivation methods, combined with the short food chain, means a low price. The majority of cooperatives in Poland therefore use the argument of cheap and healthy food to recruit new members. The argument of the low cost of food in a cooperative on the one hand indicates the mechanisms of the adaptation of the Western model to the low earnings in Poland, and on the other the cultural models of home production and preparation of food. The lack of intermediaries makes it possible to attain the most important goals of a cooperative: low prices, direct contact and the ensuing trust in the supplier, and support for ecological farmers, who deliver a larger, bulk order and immediately receive payment. In cooperatives—just like with markets—a distance is visible with regard to administrative structures and institutions, formalised procedures, top–down forms, and global intermediaries.

> It's important for me that, when I buy these vegetables, it doesn't matter if they're more ecological, or not so much, but that we can buy them directly from the farmers. That's better than buying in a shop. . . . I just didn't want to support supermarkets. (Kra/Coo/f/40)

> A very important aspect was the fact that there are no middlemen here, that no one is making money from it, . . . farmers get the money in hand direct, so as a result we also have completely different prices from those in ecological healthy food shops, because there's no mark-up. (Kra/Coo/f/30)

Cooperative members stress that the aim of their actions is to change the economic system, and oppose mass food production. They emphasise the health, epidemiological, political, and social threats of the modern food industry. They perceive the destruction of social bonds, disintegration of local communities, degradation of the environment, and lack of sustainability in various dimensions. Direct exchange is their answer to these threats.

The directness of contact with the food producer does not emerge at the individual level or among the members of the cooperative, but at the cooperative–producer level. In a cooperative numbering several dozen people, some members limit themselves to the trading process alone (ordering, packing, and collecting products), while a smaller proportion are more actively involved. Genuine direct interpersonal contact results either from one's function in the cooperative (a few people are

responsible for contact with the supplier) or from voluntary supplementary meetings with the farmers that take place outside of the trade itself. It is therefore possible to be in a cooperative, and take advantage of its short chain of exchange, but never meet the food producer. There are no individual buying strategies, no chats with the producer about one's children, the weather, or ripe strawberries, and also no individual trust. Above all, the directness means a short value chain and short informational distance, not necessarily contact during personal interactions.

The cooperative is a collective entity that, by providing its members with good food, requires self-organisation and internal specialisation. It includes people responsible for orders, for recruiting new members, and for communication. According to some informants, there is also a need to introduce a "quality control system." This results firstly from the lack of direct trust, and secondly from the expectations of cooperative members regarding the freshness and naturalness of products. Customers at markets make this kind of quality control at the point of sale by looking at and smelling the items and by weighing up their trust of the seller. It is the customers themselves who bear the consequences of the assessment, and if the purchase is unsuccessful they go to another stall or change the rules of the exchange. In a cooperative there is no such flexibility. One must also consider the different expectations within a cooperative as well as the fact that it can take even several days for the product to get from the vendor to the consumer. This leads to some reservations among cooperative members.

> You have to constantly go to see the farmer, talk with them, just check them out. You can't count on trust and so on. Unfortunately that's the way human as well as peasant mentality is. We see them as thick, they see us as suckers, so we simply have to check each other out. They get money and have less of a problem, right? It's us that has the dodgy goods we don't know what to do with later. (Kra/Coo/m/40)

Striking in this statement is the lack of trust and model of conflict adopted to describe the interaction between cooperative members and farmers. The "peasant mentality" is contrasted with the objectives, values, and motivations of the cooperative members. Being "thick" means the lack of a new type of axiological construction (environmental, local, sustainable, etc.), and being stuck in the old paradigm of modernist agriculture. It also means limiting one's perspective to individual and short-term interest. Being "suckers" means rejection of strictly capitalist, individualist objectives, a kind of big-city naivety that comes with a lack of experience of food production and lack of roots in the farmers' economy and culture. This opposition makes the voices of the food producers themselves barely audible in the narratives of the cooperative.[53] Food cooperative members adapt non-traditional lifestyles with prevailing middle-class[54] and urban foodies' attributes: omnivorous dietary patterns,[55] an association with the global ideas of slow food, sustainable development, and localness. The weakness of ecological

agriculture in Poland, with its low participation in food production, also contributes to the limited common ground between cooperatives' quality consumption and farmers. The elements of conflict in the definition of cooperative–producer relations are a particular manifestation of a socially embedded economy. The greater dependence of exchange on informal networks means that their participants become more vulnerable.[56] Violating a contract or breaking off a relationship that does not have institutional legitimation equates directly to loss of the participants of this relationship. Moral compulsion without legal or physical consequences offers no guarantee of a stable insurance policy, which is why in informal relations there is an element of mistrust and suspicion—as in the example of the "friend" at a food market cited above. In cooperatives, relations with producers are impermanent and easy to break off, but the consequences of doing so are weighty (costs, serious disruptions to the working of the cooperative or farm). This is why attempts are made to minimise the risk by formalising quality control in the cooperative or by strengthening the informal relations. This takes place through meetings and other ventures with the producers apart from the exchange (tastings, presentations, workshops, communal picking, etc.).

What is stressed above all in the collected narratives of cooperatives is relations with other cooperative members. Yet the family networks prominent among customers of markets fail to appear. Cooperative members mostly trade in their own name, without referring to the family or other communities "standing behind them." Gender roles can be identified, but they differ from the results for markets. In the cooperative, women generally dealt with the food itself (orders, distribution), while men were more strongly involved in taking care of the technical infrastructure (website, internet communication system) and standardisation of activities (statute, determining rules of operation). The intersectional overlapping of class and gender[57] results in visible, yet not traditional, that is, family-related, femininity, and masculinity models. However, the reproduction of gender inequalities in Polish cooperatives needs further research.[58]

The societal aspect of cooperatives is revealed in favouring particular social and political ideas. The economic advantages of direct exchange accompany the sense of participation in something significant, which can lead to a serious change towards what is right and at the same time natural. Cooperative members readily cite the experiences of similar enterprises in Western Europe, the United States, or other cooperatives in Poland. Local tradition is much less of an inspirational factor, and even when it is this mostly refers to the cooperatives of the beginning of the twentieth century, which operated in an entirely different economic and cultural context and set themselves different goals. Contemporary cooperatives are very much focused on the future, themselves constituting an innovative, alternative project rooted in a global perspective. For the glocal cooperative member, most traditional farmers representing the culture and economy of the Polish countryside take on the characteristics of a cultural relic. One said the following about education as one of the elements of the cooperative's mission:

> Of course you can also [educate] the farmers themselves, although if he's thick he just won't understand, so I don't know if it makes sense. He has to have a certain awareness because even if you educate him and tell him this, this and this, he'll do it his own way, because he's been doing it like that his whole life. Unfortunately peasants are a bit stupid. . . . So it has to be people from the city who move to the country and make farms there. (Kra/Coo/f/50)

Post-socialist transformation entailed redefinition of the occupational statuses of different groups of workers. Dunn describes precisely how factory workers came to be seen as workers with "socialist mentality": not independent, not responsible, and unable to take decisions.[59] A similarly essentialist discourse is visible in the above statements. A condition of successful cooperation is finding food producers who at least to a certain degree share the "mentality" of cooperative consumers/members or come from a similar background, and are "social entrepreneurs" rather than just commercial entrepreneurs.[60] Looking for producers among like-minded people, with a similar worldview, lifestyle, and cultural capital, makes it possible to build stronger informal bonds, which in turn limits the risk of unsuccessful transactions.

Part of this mentality/lifestyle comprises the means and channels of communication. Whereas food markets are based in the territorial community and an assembly that according to tradition and agreement appears regularly at a specific place and time, cooperatives are founded on contacts through new media. For them, the internet is a natural and essential context of operation. Most cooperatives have their own websites and profiles on social-media sites. Their members communicate by email and through discussion groups, and sometimes by telephone. In the cooperative I studied, orders are made using an online form and information is sent by newsletter. As a result, it is possible to act quickly and smoothly and react to sudden situations such as when a larger amount of fresh fruit becomes available or someone is needed to help with weighing and packing products. This communication channel allows the cooperative to be flexible with time and to contact other related organisations (e.g., different cooperatives or mass media). The Internet provides inspiration, is a dynamic environment engendering innovation, and at the same time has ready solutions and tools available. It is also an arena of engagement outside the local scale, at a level of broader, nationwide, or global trends and ideas.[61]

A crucial factor in cooperatives is relations between consumers. They become the driving force of the initiative, their actions acting as a counterweight to the powerlessness of individuals in the face of the huge corporations, companies, and institutions of the modern day. Alone, they do not have the power to change, are not heard, and are the passive object of economic processes. In this sense, cooperatives as collective consumer entities attempt to undermine the balance of power of the modern economic system—here specifically the food system—but they are also happy to make wider demands and speak with one voice with other associations of consumers, customers, recipients, residents, users, and other collective entities. The empowering premises of cooperatives are expressed in the slogan of one Open Food Cooperatives

Meeting, "w koopie siła," or "strength in the co-op," a play on the similar-sounding phrase "w kupie siła," or "strength in numbers."

Conclusion

The concept of social embeddedness enables us to grasp the social nature of economies. The forms and dynamics of food markets' and cooperatives' economic orders are thus intertwined with individual biographies (e.g., experience of food production), family structures (gender roles, social division of foodwork), class relations (cooperatives' members and farmers), or changes in consumption patterns (food markets' shift from universal bazaars to specialised niches). These are not barriers to economic transactions, but dimensions of them, together with calculations, instrumentalism, and marketness.

In both forms of household food supply examined here, the aspect of alterity is visible. In the case of the cooperative, this is similar to Western AFNs or new social movements. The axis on which the cooperative acts and is legitimised is its members' relationship with values, especially those involving the food system and food policy.[62] This relationship shapes the consumer–producer networks and the order of the transaction. Among customers of markets, the main criticism of the dominant, mass food chains concerns social relations and relations between humans and non-human environment. Open-air food markets, which are characterised by continuity and adaptive flexibility, are treated as supplementary to other forms, whereas more radical criticism and opposition to the mainstream is evident in the cooperative.

Both clients of markets and cooperative members declare the key importance of informal relations to ensure a successful transaction. Acquaintances at markets are sociable, strongly rooted in time, habitual, and encompass broader family and friends networks. Other researchers of post-socialist societies also underline the significance of such small, informal networks.[63] In the cooperative, as a relatively new form, relations are more recent, and require reinforcement in the form of common objectives, ideologies, lifestyles, statuses, and positions. The relations are therefore more predictable and stable between cooperative members, whereas those linking consumers and producers are significantly less obvious, albeit crucial for the cooperative's operation. This is the reason for the high risk of transactions strongly embedded in informal relations and the associated risk of tensions visible in the statements cited above.

The differing structure of relations in the two shortened food chains examined here therefore translates into a different internal dynamic, but also into their potential for change. Markets are traditional-alternative, ingrained in the everyday working of households for generations, adapting flexibly to the needs of consumers and producers, reacting to economic changes and diminishing or flourishing in response to them. Compared to new farmers' markets with local organic food, revived in direct response to the weaknesses of industrial food production, they are more diverse and inclusive.

Cooperatives, on the other hand, can fall into the trap of enclavisation and patrimonisation. A chance for avoiding this threat can be given by bridging the gap between farmers and the urban middle class from which cooperative members are recruited. This bridge can be formalised through contracts, procedures, action schemes, and certificates, or informal, but stable, long-lasting networks of acquaintance. Cooperative-farmer relations should also be considered as a window of transition for agricultural production and for urban-rural socioeconomic connections. However, consumer-producer exchange is seriously interrupted by class distances, and these challenges can also lead to redefining and strengthening farmers' new economic and social roles. Certainly this redefinition would comprise a particular axiological basis, especially claims for environmental, social, and economic sustainability within the global context. A question requiring further research is the extent to which new food system models can be anchored in traditional Eastern European agroeconomies, or whether they need complete reinvention and reproduction of Western patterns.

In any case, despite their limited scope, cooperatives have a chance to become a constant element of the Polish foodscape. They can also be the start of new forms of AFN responding to local conditions, such as the already emerging cooperative shops (Warsaw "Dobrze" cooperative), cooperatives connected to institutions and larger entities, mixed forms of cooperative and community-supported agriculture and others. The individuals involved in the cooperative movement, as well as cooperatives themselves, as collective entities, also undertake novel activities in the scope of food economies, for example, foodsharing initiatives. The visibility of cooperatives and their members in the media also mean that they indirectly influence eating patterns and become an inspiration for the food industry. This potential for innovation does not tend to apply to markets, which are characterised by considerably greater conservatism and based on the existing networks of the relations (local, family, neighbourly) and habits of their customers (e.g., morning opening times of rural markets). Yet they do form a real, tested, and strongly socially embedded alternative to mass and global food distribution channels such as supermarkets and discount stores. The attractiveness of markets may be strengthened by improving the infrastructure to make trading at them more comfortable for all parties. Such modernisations have been supported financially since 2007 from rural development programme funds. Bearing in mind the limited demand in Poland for certified ecological agriculture products (approximately 25 percent of Poles declare that they buy such items regularly[64]) and the scepticism towards eco-brands, markets can and should maintain their role as a generally available source of fresh and healthy food. Furthermore, their deep and long-lasting roots mean that market exchange networks tend to be flexible and permit deformalised trading, creating benefits for both parties of the exchange operating in the "dividual persons" model. However, these "non-normative" exchanges, which included buying on credit, advanced ordering of goods, and moving the exchange to the household, do not go beyond private networks, are not institutionalised, and do not produce new AFNs. In this sense,

although they are an important supply channel in Poland, their prospects for causing a radical change to the food system are limited.

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Notes

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